



LOCAL | A2

BASS UNIVERSITY

One way to become a better bass fisher is to learn from the best, which you can do at Bass University on Saturday in Gadsden



SPORTS | B1

GRANDPA JIMMIE

Veteran Jimmie Johnson is determined to win his record-setting 8th NASCAR Cup championship in 2018 after a somewhat down 2017

The Gadsden Times

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LOCAL | A3

GET YOUR THROW ON

Disc golf is a rapidly growing sport around here, and this weekend the Vivian Lee Maddox Sports Complex will host its first tourney in six years

Senate OKs General Fund budget

State employees would get 3 percent cost of living increase

By Brian Lyman
Montgomery Advertiser (TNS)

State employees would see their first cost of living increase in nearly a decade under a General Fund budget approved Wednesday by a Senate committee.

The 2019 General Fund, which goes into effect Oct. 1, would also provide a total increase of \$80 million to the Alabama Department of Corrections, with the goal of improving staffing and mental health care in the state's prisons. The budget added money to the Alabama Medicaid Agency, which provides coverage to about 1 million Alabamians, most of whom are children, elderly and the disabled. It also allocated money to hire about 30 new state troopers.

"It's balanced to the best of our ability," Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Montrose, the chairman of the Senate Finance and Taxation General Fund Committee, said. "The appropriations we made are going to be based on the revenues we expect to get based on people going to work every day."

The \$2 billion General Fund would be the largest in a decade. During and after the Great Recession, the General Fund lurched from crisis to crisis due to its mostly-flat revenue

streams. This year, growth in Internet sales taxes, estimated at about \$40 million, and about \$92 million in carry-forward money from last year's budget gave legislators some breathing room.

It also gave the state's 33,000 state employees — ranging from custodians to law enforcement officers to attorneys — a 3 percent cost of living increase. The Legislative Fiscal Office estimates the increase will cost the General Fund budget \$14.4 million.

The committee approved the pay raise bill — sponsored by Sen. Clyde Chambliss, R-Prattville — despite reservations from Pittman, long an opponent of increased spending in most elements of the state budget.

"We had funds this year that may or may not be available next year," he said.

"We're certainly appreciative," Mac McArthur, executive director of the Alabama State Employees Association, said. "It's been 10 years since state employees have had a COLA. It is much needed and will cut into state employee pay gaps."

The budget will also provide an additional \$50 million to Corrections, which must improve mental health care in the state's prisons. U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson ruled last year

See FUND, A8

Gunman kills at least 17 at school



Parents wait for news after reports of a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., on Wednesday. [JOEL AUERBACH/ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Florida shooting deadliest since Sandy Hook

The Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. — A former student opened fire at a Florida high school Wednesday, killing at least 17 people and sending scores of students fleeing into the streets in the nation's deadliest school shooting since a gunman attacked an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut.

The shooter, who was equipped with a gas mask and smoke grenades, set off a fire alarm to draw students out of their classrooms shortly before the school day ended, officials said.

Authorities offered no immediate details on the



In this frame grab from video provided by WPLG-TV, students from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., evacuate the school following a shooting there Wednesday. [WPLG-TV/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

19-year-old suspect or any possible motive, except to say that he had been expelled for disciplinary reasons.

Frantic parents rushed to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School to find SWAT team members and ambulances surrounding the campus. Live footage showed emergency workers who appeared to be treating the

wounded on sidewalks.

"It is a horrific situation," Robert Runcie, superintendent of the school district in Parkland, about an hour's drive north of Miami, said. "It is a horrible day for us."

The suspect was taken into custody without a fight about an hour after he left the scene.

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From left, Sam Johnson and Mariella McNair serve sausage and pancakes at Convention Hall during Kiwanis Pancake Day in Gadsden last February. [FILE/THE GADSDEN TIMES]

Pancake Day: 60 years of tradition

By Cassidy Smith

Times Intern

Every town has those days where things get exciting: there's a certain energy in the air, people are happy and the community comes together. The Kiwanis Club of Gadsden's Pancake Day has, for 60 years now, been one of those days.

Keeping with tradition, the event will begin at 6 a.m. Saturday and wrap up about 2 p.m. After this year, however, a new tradition will be set forth; this year's Pancake Day will likely be the last held at Convention Hall. The hope

is that next year it can be shifted to the new convention center at the Venue at Coosa Landing.

"Last year we fed over 7,000 people," said Glen Williams, president of the Kiwanis Club of Gadsden. "We're hoping for at least that many, hopefully closer to 8,000 this year."

Pancake fans of Etowah County can look forward to \$5 servings of three pancakes, two pieces of sausage, and a drink (usually coffee, milk or soft drinks). Plates are available for both dine-in and take-out. Tickets can be bought from any Kiwanis Club member and also will be

available at the door on Saturday morning.

This year's festivities will include another exciting event for one little girl: Mabrey Gilbreath, who turns 8 this weekend, told her mother that she wanted to hold her birthday party at Pancake Day. Her decision showcases the love that many Gadsdenites have for this annual event.

"We're gonna do a little something extra for her, set up some tables and make it special," Williams said. "Nobody's ever held their own party at one of our events, so

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